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THE EMERGENCE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION.

BY- ADAMS, HENRY BABCOCK

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THE CRISIS OVER RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, RAPID SOCIAL CHANGE, THE KNOWLEDGE EXPLOSION, AND AVAILABILITY OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO A PHENOMENAL EMERGENCE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR MINISTERS. BECAUSE CONTINUING EDUCATION IS MORE LIKELY TO BE ACTION RESEARCH, IT MUST ASK WHAT THE CHURCH'S MISSION IS AND WHAT METHODS ARE MOST EFFECTIVE IN ACHIEVING THE OBJECTIVES OF MISSION. THIS PROMISES TO SET A NEW CENTER OF GRAVITY FOR THEOLOGIZING--IN A CONTINUING DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE THEOLOGICAL FACULTIES AND MATURE AND EXPERIENCED MINISTERS. THE CONSENSUS AND SUPPORT FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION MUST HAVE PROFOUND INFLUENCE ON CHANGES IN PRE-ORDINATION EDUCATION--THEOLOGICAL STUDIES MAY BE SEEN AS THE SOURCE FOR THEORIES WHICH ARE CONFIRMED OR REFINED BY PRACTICE, STUDIES FOR ORDINATION SHOULD PREPARE MINISTERS FOR A LIFE OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING, METHODS MUST BE THOSE BEST SUITED TO THE MATURE ADULT, AND THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS SHOULD SEE THEIR PART IN THE EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH AND PROVIDE FOR THE NECESSARY INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES AND FACULTY CAPABLE OF ASSISTING THE EDUCATION OF MATURE, PRACTICING MINISTERS. (EB)

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THE EMERGENCE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

Henry Babcock Adams

Continuing education may be defined as any deliberately contrived program of learning which has its beginning at that point where study ceases to be the learner's primary occupation.[1] As such it is not new. For centuries enterprising men have planned and executed programs of self-development. And in more recent decades, schools have provided resources for these purposes and made programs of study more and more widely available.

Continuing education for the clergy is not new. Self-directed development has from the earliest times been an assumed responsibility of those assigned to special leadership in the church. As early as the 16th Century John Calvin, and in the 18th Century John Wesley, devised programs of systematic study for ministers.[2] In this century, universities, denominational agencies and theological schools in the United States have offered a growing list of conferences, seminars, lectureships, study guides, correspondence courses and summer sessions which fall under this definition of continuing education for ministers.

What is new in continuing education for ministers (at least in the United States) is the self-consciousness of those involved in this work, as well as those who see the values attendant upon systematic, open-ended learning. These people feel themselves engaged in a movement with gathering momentum and immense importance.

> Those who have felt the contagion of continuing education consider that they stand at least on the threshold of a breakthrough into the continuum of a minister's whole experience as a servant of God.[3]

In 1964 at Andover Newton Seminary an ecumenical consultation on the continuing education of ministers assembled fifty interested leaders of denominations, agencies and theological schools. Their purpose was to identify the common agreements which bound them together and the issues which divided them, or on which they were uncertain. Expenses were covered by a grant from Lilly Endowment.[4]

Enthusiasm was so great that a second consultation was immediately called for. And in 1965 it was assembled at the University of Chicago with nearly 100 persons, who professionally direct this kind of educational work in attendance, paying their own way. Within the year between these consultations, the number of persons known to be administratively involved in continuing education for ministers had doubled. The amount of consensus on crucial matters had increased enormously, and there was eagerness to tackle the ramaining points of differences.[5] Information reported on programs of continuing education available to ministers indicated a proliferation hardly realized by the church leaders most conversant with such matters.

CASUAL FACTORS

A number of factors seems to have contributed to this phenomenal emergence of continuing education. At least four are apparent.

The ferment in theology. What has been called the "crisis in belief" takes many forms. Many pastors frankly admit to deep uncertainty about what they can believe; others, less candid, give evidence of similar anxiety. Denomination-wide explorations of "the nature of the ministry" have been set up in response to this wide-spread concern. Writers such as Bishop Robinson, Gibson Winter, Peter Berger and Harvey Cox reflect the theological ferment and stimulate it.

The uncertainties are not confined to convictions about the nature of the church and its mission and ministry, but at least one clear focus of concern is found here. And the issue is far from abstract for thousands of clergymen. If they are not sure about the church and the mission Christ has committed to it, how can they decide what they should do and leave undone among the claims upon their time? When traditional concepts of their role in relation to the whole people of God are called in question, how will they act responsibly? The ambiguity and frustration of American Protestant clergymen has been amply documented by social research. Their concerns inspire a desire to know, to inquire, to resolve their uncertainties.

Rapid social change. If there is one characteristic of the present era more radical than any other in its effect upon the requirements of the church's ministry, it is rapid social change. Christian faith requires that God's people express their commitment to God in human relationships which in some sense can be described as moral. Social change has moved so rapidly that conduct which once seemed immutably an expression of Christian ethics no longer seems so sure. Civil rights, armed conflict, the right to die, sexual relations, and individualism versus collective responsibility -- all pose issues very nearly peculiar to our present age.

By what wisdom shall a pastor give guidance to the people of God? What is his role and contribution in such matters? The problems posed by social change cannot be postponed. To the minister they are crucially related to the integrity of Christian faith and life. So it is not suprising that such concerns impel him to inquiries he could not have undertaken during his seminary days.

The knowledge explosion. The more men know, the more they can learn; and knowledge has increased in our day in an explosive way. Much that is relevant to the minister's choices in his work was not known or was unavailable to him a decade or more ago. The possibility of knowing carries the responsibility to know.

The growth of reliable knowledge is dramatic in virtually every field upon which the minister draws. It is perhaps most obvious in the behavioral sciences which illuminate the way men are affected by the circumstances and influences which are accidentally or intentionally imposed. But it is no less importantly found in studies that have brought new understanding of the biblical records, both in their meaning for their own times and derivatively for their application in the present. And it is found in the recovery of an historical perspective which perceives God at work leading his people to understandings that unfold within the changing contexts of history and express themselves in the process of theological formulation and confession, rather than in a single theology. In a society which demands continued acquaintance with the growing edge of knowledge as the sine qua non of competence, the minister is impelled to engage in continuing study.

The means. All the foregoing elements evoke within clergymen a desire to inquire, to learn, to grow. Without the opportunity for fulfillment, desire is easily extinguished. But in this present time, at least in the United States, the means are available. Rapid transportation and communication are combined with unprecedented access to funds for the cost of study. To be sure, there is hardly a minister who does not feel that his funds are insufficient. But relatively speaking the churches of the United States have never been so affluent. One has only to cite the automobile, the driving allowance for the pastor, increasing use of air travel and its declining cost, provision for study leave, church libraries, book budgets and denominational investment in continuing education to demonstrate the point.

There are important groups of ministers who notably lag in their access to the means, but they only highlight the trend toward access to means which has been growing for years. One theological school finances its three-year and seven-year -long continuing education programs entirely from fees paid in large part from church budgets, and those enrolled number more than one-third of that school's total student body.

RELATION TO MISSION AND MINISTRY

Continuing education offers great promise for a better understanding of the church and its mission, and derivatively a better understanding of the minister's part in that mission and the education requisite for his effectiveness. Because continuing education is more likely to be "action-research," aimed at enabling the church to fulfill its mission more effectively, it must ask two crucial questions. It must ask what methods are most effective in achieving the objectives of mission. And it must ask what the church's mission is in order to evaluate achievement. Its inquiries are therefore double-pronged, exploring mission and appropriate ministries that reflect it.

Those engaged in continuing education are predominantly the practicing leaders of congregations and other groupings of God's people. So, their studies rise from an existential perspective. The concerns which impel their investment of time and energy derive from their involvement with the people of God in mission. And this constitutes a vital polarity frequently absent from traditional theological study.

To illustrate, in one continuing education group a pastor replied to the theological professor, "I cannot speak for many congregations. I've served only four. But I've served in the present congregation for twelve years. And I know what you suggest simply would not work."

There was a silence during which every member of the group nodded in agreement. And then the theologian acknoweledged, "At this point you are more expert than I am."

Theological faculties are an important resource for attempts to discover God's will and purpose for the church. But professors, by virtue of the peculiar nature of their work, are cut off from daily involvement with the practicing community of the faith where pastors live. Theological specialists bring vital insights for the development of theory. But experienced and mature pastors bring to the dialogue unique insights from the practice of religion

which may confirm or refine theory.

Continuing education, as an activity that brings together different kinds of "experts" in a community of inquiry, takes seriously a philosophical and theoretical approach to the problems of mission and ministry. But it gives increasingly serious attention to the realities found in the life of the church and the world as equally primary sources for theological inquiry. It believes that God has revealed himself to men of old and that the records preserved to us are vital to an understanding of what God requires in this day. It also believes that God is still at work in his world, offering a revelation which men must try to identify. And it holds that understanding God's revelation to us in our time is found best by bringing these different sources into continuing dialogue with each other.

Thinking theologically, or theologizing, may be defined as the continual effort to understand the meanings of life in theological terms, the identification of issues as judged by criteria drawn from the Christian vocation, the perception of ways by which the Christian vocation may properly be expressed in the activities of occupation and leisure.

The emergence of continuing education for ministers, as a movement of gathering influence and momentum in the United States promises to set a new center of gravity for theologizing. It gives renewed prominence to the practicing community of the faith in both the gathered and the dispersed people of God, however the church may be structured for mission. It recognizes the contribution of the academic community of scholars in universities, theological faculties and the like. It ackonwledges the insights and biases of each group but finds them complementary to each other. And it places the center of gravity not in one or the other, but in a continuing dialogue between the two, juxtaposed in creative tension.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Continuing education for ministers in the United States has emerged with a remarkable amount of consensus, with support at the grass roots level of the church that is not yet fully appreciated, and with insights that are bound to have profound influence upon the patterns of education that prepare men for ordination.

Philosophy. Perhaps the most subtle implication for theological education, but by no means the least important, is the shift of the center of gravity to include the practice of ministry on a parity with theological disciplines. Traditionally theological educators, including most of those in the so-called practical fields, have seen biblical and theological disciplines as the primary disciplines. The practical disciplines are seen as dealing with arts which derive their validity from Bible and Theology and are, therefore, subordinate and secondary. Pastors extract a theory of mission and ministry from these theological and biblical studies, which are essentially philosophical in nature and are judged by their consistency with presuppositions and by their internal integrity. So the practice of ministry in activities such as teaching, preaching, social action, administration, counseling and the like is judged by its expression of theory derived from Bible and Theology.

Continuing education is more likely to see Biblical and theological studies as the sources from which theory is initially derived and the practice of ministry as a source of data by which theory is confirmed or refined. God's will for his people in this day is not found solely in the realities of life nor in the writings of experts from the present or the past, but in the way data from these two sources mesh.

Continuing education is an emergent phenomenon on almost every theological campus in the United States, in one form or another. One of its influences is clearly to shift the epicenter of theological education away from the classical disciplines as traditionally defined and to place it in the dialogue between the academic and practicing communities of the church. The extent to which this takes place on any theological campus, of course, depends upon the emphasis given to continuing education and the influence pastors who study there have upon what they study. But the impact of continuing education and the direction of its influence are clear.

Objectives. Already continuing education for the ministry in the United States serves thousands of men every year. Precisely how many is not known, but certainly many times the number who are enrolled in resident studies in the nation's theological schools. And the number engaged in such continuing studies is growing at a staggering rate.

The availability of such opportunities for continued growth implies a change in the objectives of studies that prepare men for ordination. More and more it is apparent that studies for ordination should at least prepare men for a life of continuing learning which can exploit the opportunities and resources increasingly available.

This calls for teaching men how to learn. It is possible to transmit information, teach skills and cultivate sound judgment with regard to many things by a process that can be called educational. But in learning these things a man may have little awareness of the process by which he learned, and emerge without the capacity to carry on that process independent of teachers.

One prominent emphasis in continuing education is upon developing a man's ability to carry on the learning process with growing independence. He is helped to understand the value of asking those questions that give direction to inquiry. He learns how to assemble relevant information and process it for usefulness. And he acquires skill in interpreting the significance of data for sound conclusions. Beyond all that, he discovers the importance of testing, confirmation and refinement of the theories formulated by his mental process. And because he must work simultaneously in the arena of values and value judgments (such as theology, ethics and politics) and in the field of reliable facts from the world of reality (such as the behavioral sciences), the process of learning with independence requires more of him than is ordinarily assumed.

A further implication for the objectives of theological education is found in the development of satisfaction in learning. One of the greatest obstacles to continuing study among adults lies in unsatisfactory educational experience in early years. There is growing recognition among theological educators that students for the ministry frequently regard their theological studies not as an exciting adventure of the mind but as a necessary prerequisite to a position in the church. Since there is ordinarily no other route to ministerial service except through a theological school, they accept it as necessary.

In continuing education, by contrast, mature ministers simply do not persist in studies which are not evidently rewarding. Studies may be aimed at what educators believe to be ultimate needs of the students, but of necessity these ultimate needs must be approached through the felt needs of students. Continuing education places high among its objectives the achievement of satisfaction in learning because men will not persist as continuing learners without it. And the influence upon pre-ordination studies will certainly be to bring a similar shift in objectives.

Methodology. Educational work with mature adults in continuing education has highlighted certain elements important to method which are easily overlooked by those teaching young men in their early twenties. Young men in preparation for ordination are not children. Increasingly, they are married, with military or employment experience, with their own children, and largely independent of parental support. They think of themselves as adults and expect to be treated as such. Educational method, which inherits the procedures of high school or even many undergraduate colleges, does not take into account the psychological conditions which are different among these students.

Educational work with adults makes it clear that they do not easily learn things for which their past experience brings little readiness. Some things can be learned better after they are exposed to some vital need than before they are exposed to such experience. Readiness for learning may dictate a different order for curricular materials than is ordinarily derived from divisions of the subject. For example, is it better to study Greek first in order that Biblical studies may be equipped with the tools of exegesis? Or is it more in keeping with the readiness of studnets to begin with Biblical studies that awaken an awareness of the need for tools that make inquiry in depth possible?

Second it has become clear that adults learn best when they have more initiative in planning the process. Growing initiative contributes to independence, but this principle of adult learning is more fundamental than that. Opportunity and responsibility for self-direction have much to do with motivation for learning, and motivation may determine achievement far more than sheer intelligence.

The more men are expected to give direction to their studies, the more experienced and effective they become. Counseling in the process, of course, is a vital contribution. But such freedom to direct their studies joined with skillful counseling is not widely found in theological schools. One of the implications of continuing education for pre-ordination studies is the importance of these elements.

Third, the more mature the student is the less able he is to benefit in the same way from the same curricular experiences in the same order as other students. Children are very much alike in their background experience and their abilities, and therefore in the curriculum from which they can benefit. But every advancing year, especially as they become adults, makes them increasingly different from their fellow-classmates with whom they came up through school.

Continuing education has learned to take this into account, or has failed to hold its students and contribute to their growth. Counseling in the

arrangement of studies and guidance in fitting many small bits into a systematic learning process, is the result. Clearly this methodology should have an implication for studies preparatory to ordination.

Fourth, goal-oriented learning is the most viable approach for adults, and anything less labors under a handicap. Adults come to learning experiences seeking answers to questions, solutions to problems. Whatever is relevant to the pursuit of their goals is worthy of examination. That pursuit of a goal may take them into study of a particular discipline, but more often it will take them into several disciplines where information is vital to the answers they seek. Conventional studies which are structured by the subject-matter of the discipline, therefore, tend to be restrictive and less satisfactory than studies which are inter-disciplinary. Continuing education has learned the importance of taking into account the psychology of learning and the way men's involvements produce dynamics conducive to learning.

Administration. All that has been said implies certain things for the planning, financing and oversight of theological schools. The growing demand for continuing education from thousands of American ministers puts pressure on theological schools. These schools may treat continuing education as a kind of public relations effort aimed at winning the friendship of a supporting constituency. Or they may lift their sights and catch a new vision of theological education in which pre-ordination studies and continuing education are made part of a single unified whole. Other agencies of the churches, and certainly universities and institutions of the society have resources invaluable for education for ministry. But theological schools are an arm of the church uniquely charged with this educational function. It is to be hoped that seminaries will see their responsibilities in this larger, unified perspective, and there is some reason to think they are beginning to do so.

To the extent that seminaries do see continuing education as a serious responsibility, there is implied a need for professors capable of assisting the education of mature, practicing ministers of the church. Such professors are expert in their own right but feel no threat in acknowledging that students are in some sense experts too. Such professors can glean from ministers with experience in the church insights crucial to theological inquiry. They will be no less able to teach, but their teaching will be more a community of learning, a dialogue rather than a monologue. Such professors will be welcomed by practicing ministers who study, and they will provide an important feedback into planning of school administration that will keep it more adaptive to necessary change as educational needs evolve.

Continuing education requires interdisciplinary studies and professors who are able to move freely and competently across the boundaries between disciplines. Too long has there been an unadmitted ideal of the scholar who is thoroughly familiar with the body of knowledge in his field, even though he may know little about other fields. This is the Biblical expert who knows little about preaching and teaching in the church, or the psychologist who is unacquainted with the implications of a doctrine of man, or the expert in liturgy who is unfamiliar with psychology or communications.

Under the influence of growing involvement in contining education, seminary administrators may seek faculty members who have their special fields of competence but who are sophisticated in many related fields, as well.

Not only will such resource persons be essential in continuing education. They will prove their value in resident study preparing men for ordination; a pastor, too, must be able to move competently in many fields.

Continuing education is defined as a planned program of learning which has its beginning at the point where study ceases to be the learner's chief occupation. Young men come up through the educational system. And until they take up an occupation in life and become practitioners of some sort, they occupy a student role. Learning is their obvious social function. But when they take on their practitioner roles in society, learning ceases to be a primary function and becomes contributory.

In the United States, professors are virtually the only persons who do not regularly make this shift in social role. High school and elementary teachers are practitioners of the teaching professions, with learning contributory to their service. But sociologically speaking, men who become professors continue to be students, and teach to pay expenses. They are most frequently judged by their research, their publication and their standing among their scholarly peers.

One of the problems of continuing education is how to find capable men who are learning teachers, rather than teaching scholars -- those who can help clergymen become learning ministers. A difference in orientation toward learning frequently creates a gulf between professors and mature ministers. So those charged with continuing education seek out men who can adapt their orientation, and they try to help professors understand the importance and ways of doing so. Continuing education needs experts who do not confuse their own goals for learning with the goals required by ministers engaged in studies. The impact of this is to influence the education of educators and it has significant implications for theological schools.

The emergence of continuing education as a self-conscious movement both within and beyond the theological schools of the United States is of great significance for the education of men for ministry. The social and economic forces at work in the movement exert great pressures. And it seems inevitable that continuing education will have a profound influence on the shape of theological education in the nation.

Continuing education highlights insights about the learning process which have frequently been ignored, recognizes the continuity of preparatory education with life-long learning, and highlights the elements in teachers and curricula that are requisite for the best leraning. It brings this about by engaging representatives of the practicing and the scholarly communities of the church in an on-going dialogue that gives realities in the life of religion a renewed place of importance as a primary source for theological inquiry.

Ten years ago, H. Richard Niebuhr wrote:

> A theological education which does not lead young men and women to embark on a continuous, ever incomplete but ever sustained effort to study and to understand the meaning of their work and of the situation in which they labor is neither theological nor education.[6]

The validity of his assertion is being acknowledged increasingly in the seminaries and churches of the nation. And a large part of the influence that evokes this acknowledgement is found in the emergence of continuing education for ministers. It combines peculiarly complementary commitments and insights and so carries a potential for reshaping the thinking of the whole church under the leadership of the Spirit.

NOTES

[1]This definition has wide currency in adult education generally and has become the working definition for planning in an increasing number of groups involved in continuing education. Cf. Report of the Consultation on Continuing Education to the General Council, Philadelphia; United Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1965, p. 15. In essence, although in slightly different form, this definition is found repeatedly in Consultation on Continuing Education for the Ministry, New York: National Council of Churches, 1965.

[2]Connolly Gamble, "Theological Schools and the Minister's Continuing Education," Theological Education, Summer, 1965, p. 197.

[3]Lynn Leavenworth, "Advantages and Hazards for the Seminary in Continuing Education," Theological Education, Summer, 1965, p. 236.

[4]Cf. Consultation on Continuing Education for the Ministry, New York: National Council of Churches, 1964.

[5]Cf. Consultation on Continuing Education for the Ministry, New York: National Council of Churches, 1965.

[6]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry, New York: Harpers, 1956, p. 134.

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